LOS ANGELES — The Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) presents **Merion Estes: Unnatural Disasters**, a twenty-year survey of the Los Angeles-based mixed media artist. Rooted in feminist art that grew out of her work with L.A.’s iconic Woman’s Building, Estes is notable for her involvement in the Pattern and Decoration movement of the 1970s and ’80s. This solo presentation comprises twenty large-scale collaged paintings made with found fabrics, mixed paint applications, and photo transfers to create rich, colorful landscapes that are simultaneously beautiful and disturbing. Each work expresses deep environmental concerns including climate change, species extinction, pollution, and other natural and manmade disasters. A complement of smaller sculptures will accompany the paintings. **Merion Estes: Unnatural Disasters** is on view from September 30, 2018 to January 6, 2019.

“This exhibition presents Merion Estes’ stunningly multi-layered images that match sumptuous surfaces with the devastation caused by our ongoing environmental crises,” says CAFAM executive director Suzanne Isken. “As we watch the unraveling of legislation created to safeguard our health and our planet, I hope her work will motivate audiences to stand up against the folly of the anti-environmental decision-making by our current elected officials.”

As part of the loose-knit Pattern and Decoration movement of the 1970s and ’80s, Estes was among several American artists working in both the East and West Coasts who were countering the stark aesthetic legacy of Minimalism with dense ornamentation. Estes’ works incorporate saturated colors and decorative details such as glitter, acrylic paint, and photo transfers on mass-produced printed fabrics of contemporary African or Japanese design.

Within the striking visual commotion of her paintings, Estes obliquely refers to the major natural and manmade disasters of the last two decades. **Smithereens** (2012) uses abstracted blue swirls on orange-patterned fabric to reference the Fukushima nuclear power plant-meltdown of 2011. The past two years’ record-breaking heatwaves in concurrence with climate change is represented in the bright, hot tones of **Cooling Trend** (2017). **Los Alamos Sunset** (2014) portrays the beautiful, abstracted landscape of New Mexico, while also recognizing it as the birthplace of nuclear weaponry. Meanwhile, **Toxic Depths** (2004) and **Neptune’s Revenge** (2015) depict marine pollution due to chemical spills and industrial waste. A respite from the undercurrent of darkness that pervades the paintings comes from a grouping of small-scale whimsical sculptures that emphasize the playful quality of Estes’ work, as well.

Merion Estes (b. 1938) was born in Salt Lake City, UT and raised in San Diego, CA. She received her BFA from the University of New Mexico and MFA from the University of Colorado in Boulder. In addition to exhibiting at various private galleries and museums over the past forty years, she was the subject of a major thirty-five-year retrospective at the Pomona College Museum of Art in 2006. In 2017, she was recipient of the Murray Reich Distinguished Artist Award presented by the New York Foundation for the Arts.
OPENING RECEPTION
An opening reception for Merion Estes: Unnatural Disasters takes place on Saturday, October 6 from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. The reception is free for CAFAM members and open to the public for a $12 entry fee.

CREDITS
Merion Estes: Unnatural Disasters is organized by guest curator Howard N. Fox, former curator of contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1985-2008). The exhibition is supported by the Antonia and Vladimir Kulaev Cultural Heritage Fund; Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles; and the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation.

CATALOGUE
A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition featuring a principle essay by curator Howard N. Fox and an interview with Estes by her longtime friend and writer Robert D. Kirvel. The catalogue will be available at the CAFAM Shop or at cafamshop.org.

LIMITED EDITION PRINT
A limited edition print by Sherin Guirguis will be available for sale through the CAFAM Shop. The silkscreen and gold leaf print was produced at Self Help Graphics & Art.

PROGRAMS
CAFAM will offer exhibition-related workshops and events in conjunction with the exhibition, including CraftNight on the first Thursday of the month from 7:00 – 9:30 p.m. and CraftLab family workshops on the second Sunday of each month from 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Artist Talk with Merion Estes
Date TBD

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